

North County MSCP **Ramona Vernal Pools**

Historically, vernal pools -- temporary and seasonal wetlands that support several endangered and/or sensitive species of plants and animals -- have been found in what is now the residential and commercial center ("downtown area") of Ramona. Although about 50 – 70 vernal pools still exist on vacant lots and backyards throughout downtown Ramona, the majority of the remaining vernal pools are now found west of the downtown area in the Ramona grasslands surrounding the Ramona Airport.

For the downtown properties, there is an issue of providing appropriate economic development while addressing endangered species that exist in many vernal pools. For this reason the Department of Planning and Land Use received \$75,000 in grant funds from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Wetlands Protection Development Program to hire a consultant to develop maps, profiles and protection plans for vernal pools in Ramona that will enhance California's protection of these rare aquatic ecosystems. The goal of the Ramona vernal pool study was to determine which vernal pools have reasonable prospects for long-term viability and those that are vulnerable to uncontrollable external disturbance so that they could be impacted in exchange for appropriate mitigation.

This study has been completed and staff is reviewing and analyzing the results to determine how to obtain coverage under the North County MSCP Plan. and this paper summarizes the recommendations of that report and the community's wishes, proposes a strategy to resolve these competing interests, and raises some remaining issues to be resolved in more detail.

Summary of Ramona Vernal Pool Study

Vernal pools in Ramona have been affected by displacement by human development, disturbance through agricultural conversion and the spread of non-native species. Many of the vernal pools would benefit from restoration efforts, particularly in the downtown area where impacts have been severe. There is a strong potential that these urban pressures may eliminate the sensitive species inhabiting these vernal pools. Preservation of these downtown properties faces several serious obstacles, including high land prices, lower habitat values (according to the EPA-study's model), and high ongoing management costs.

The results from the EPA-funded study provided a rank of all the vernal pools in the Ramona area based on our current knowledge of biological resources, surrounding land uses, and proximity to other vernal pools. It is also important to include a representation of different types of pools to assure adequate conservation of all species and varieties. This is especially true of pools on Placentia soils, which probably held the majority of vernal pools in Ramona historically. Accessibility to pollinators is also important to assure the continued survival of vernal pool plant species. Studies have shown that pollinators seldom visit habitat patches over one mile from a larger preserve. The two largest vernal pool habitat patches in Ramona are in the grasslands surrounding the Ramona airport and near Ramona High School (which has proposed a development project and preservation of 15 vernal pools on site). These two sites are approximately two miles apart and would benefit by maintaining a connection in the downtown area.